

*The
Little
Woman
in the
Spout*



MARY
AGNES
BYRNE



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TO MY MOTHER



THEY RETURNED, LOOKING LIKE "FOREST NYMPHS"

The
LITTLE WOMAN
IN THE SPOUT

BY

MARY AGNES BYRNE

Author of "ROY AND ROSYROCKS," etc.



ILLUSTRATED

Akron, Ohio

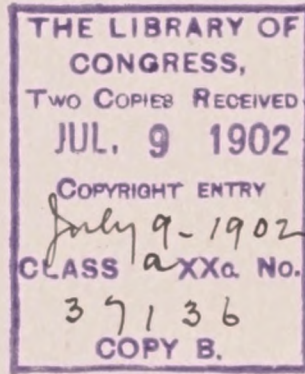
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THE LITTLE WOMAN IN THE SPOUT

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE WOMAN



DOWN the street came two little maids. Edie's pink gingham sunbonnet hanging down her back, its flight toward the earth hindered by the strings securely tied beneath her chin, while Maude's buff sunshade was converted into a basket and hung on her arm, o'erflowing with wild flowers.

"I wonder how the Little Woman is to-day," said Maude anxiously.

"Do hope she wasn't washed out by the flood," returned Edie.

They hopped into the gutter and peered into the square opening of a wooden spout which led from a yard close by. This yard was enclosed by a high wall, a door-like gate opening into it just above the spout. The girls would have been very indignant had they heard anyone

call it by so plebeian a name as a spout; they had accidentally discovered it one day when making a voyage down the gutter and to them it was the Little Woman's house. To be sure they had never seen the Little Woman, but their faith in her was strong, strengthened by the fact that whatever prized article they placed inside her house—a favorite paper doll, a candy toy, or anything else they thought she might fancy—would on their next visit be found missing, their little friend having of course removed it to the inner rooms of her house.

Many happy hours were spent there, and I am sure Columbus never derived so much pleasure over his great discovery as they did over theirs in the gutter. But then it was an ideal gutter, not one of the common kind, but a regular old-fashioned one running along the quiet street of a dear old country town, its cobblestones white from the oft recurring storms which brought a stream of seething water down the steep hill to the waiting river below. Only a week previous an unusually heavy freshet had swollen the stream to a thing of foaming madness encroaching on the sidewalk as though vexed at its firmness in spite of the water's onslaught before which the catnip-weeds and the grasses, poor weaker things, bowed and bent to the ground.

Great had been our friends' anxiety for the safety of the Little Woman during this time and one rainy day they obtained permission to sally forth with storm cloaks,

and rubber shoes and a large umbrella, on a tour of investigation.

“Maybe she is safe after all,” said Edie hopefully. The welcome “maybe” was eagerly accepted by the small folks, as it sometimes is by larger, and it was changed into conviction when Maude stooped venture-somely over the sidewalk, and, holding the handle of the umbrella with one hand, plunged the other into the water and feeling around cried rapturously: “O Edie the Little Woman’s house is not gone, it’s here!” Then her friend’s small fist was dipped in to make sure, and it was only a miracle that kept the monster umbrella, with the two beaming urchins clinging to it, from sailing away all three together.

This happened several days ago; the storm had ceased and the sun coming out slaked his thirst leaving the gutter dry; no trace remained of the water’s havoc except the grasses which bent beneath a burden of mud.

The girls now cleared all obstructions to the Little House and found it a scene of desolation, with stones, and weeds and earth piled halfway to the ceiling. Their hearts sank. Surely this betokened the destruction of its tiny mistress. It was with a feeling of labor lost that they removed the *debris*.

While they were thus engaged the gate in the wall opened and a little girl came out and stood shyly watching them. She was about nine years old, a slight, deli-

cate looking creature, with blue eyes and flaxen hair which hung in waves below her waist.

Several minutes elapsed before the girls perceived her. Suddenly Edie looked up and cried, "Hello." Maude added, "Hello there," the stranger replied, "Hello." She advanced toward them shyly asking, "What are you playing?"

"We are cleaning the Little Woman's house."

"What Little Woman, where does she live?"

They explained all about that mysterious personage.

"I would love to see her!" exclaimed the new arrival.

"But we never *can*! She always comes out when we are away."

"Then how did you find out that she really lives there?"

"Why one day me and Maudie were eating cake and Maudie said, 'Let's leave a piece for the Little Woman,' and I said, 'But she won't ever come out for it,' and Maudie said, 'Let's try,' and we put a bit just inside her door——"

"And the next day it was clear gone, and Edie gave her such a lovely chair!"

"But she never comes when we're looking, it breaks the charm, but now we are afraid she's gone!"

"Maybe she only went on a visit," suggested the newcomer.

"That's just what we think, or maybe she's away back in the kitchen wondering why we don't clean up so she can come out! So let's get to work!"

"She must live away, away under the ground!" remarked the little maid who watched their energetic efforts as sleeves were rolled above elbows and chubby hands thrust far into the spout.

"Yes indeed," answered Maude, wiping her heated brow with her sunbonnet. "If we lived as near as you we could come out often and watch for her!"

"So would I if I could but I can't be spared to run out very often."

"Why?"

Before she could answer a voice inside the gate called sharply "Lottie, Lot-tie."

"Good-bye, I must go!" and she was gone.

"Her name is Lottie, then."

"To think we have been talking all this time and don't know her *full name*!"

"Wonder who she is? Prestons have no little girl."

Several days passed before they again saw their new acquaintance, but when she appeared at last they had good news for her.

"The Little Woman is all right, she took the posies we left for her that night," cried Maude dancing with delight.

“And she’s washing to-day like she used to,” added Edie.

“Why, does she wash too?”

“Yes indeedy, come and see! Real soapsuds!”

They pulled her to a seat beside them on the curbstone and pointed to a small stream of soapy water that bubbled from the spout in rainbow colors very much like the suds she had seen only a short while before dancing beneath the black palms of old Aunt Chloe, who stood in the laundry over the weekly wash.

“Where have you been for so long?” queried they after a while.

“Right here, but I couldn’t be spared to run out very often. I came for a minute the other day but you were not here.”

“What time was it?”

“In the morning about ten o’clock.”

“Oh, we are hardly *ever* here ’till after school hours.”

“Do you go to schools, girls?” she returned, rapturously.

“Of course! Don’t you? But then you are a visitor!”

“I’m not a visitor, I’m the *bound girl*!”

Her listeners were puzzled; they had heard of slave girls, and hired girls, but a bound girl was something new.

“What *is* a bound girl?”

"Why Mrs. Preston took me from the Home to do chores around, and run errands and do lots of things."

"Where are your folks?"

"I haven't any folks——"

"Not even a *mamma*?"

She shook her head sorrowfully.

"Mamma took sick and didn't even know me; she kept crying out, 'Lottie, my little girl, what will become of Lottie!' and then *she died*. I wasn't even allowed to kiss her good-bye, 'cause she had the fever, they said; I know mamma would feel so bad if she knew I was kept from kissing her, but she didn't know, of course. Then she was buried beside papa."

The tears stood in three pairs of eyes.

"Then you are a norphan!"

"Yes. Have *you* folks?"

Fortunately they could both answer in the affirmative.

"Well let's introduce each other! We heard Claudy Preston call you 'Lottie.'"

"Yes, my name is Carlotta Lake."

"Miss Lake this is my dearest friend, Edie Carver," said Maude in regular grown-up style.

The two indicated bowed formally.

"My bosom friend, Maude Burke, Miss Lake," Edie said, doing the honors in turn. Then there was a second grave bow of acknowledgment.

"Do you like to live here, Lottie?"

"Yes I love it 'cause it's so nice with trees and flowers. There wasn't a bit of grass at the Home — the yards all brick and the walls so high up. I hated to leave some of the girls and I missed them awful at first, but now I'll have you and the Little Woman!"

"We will have lovely times together! If you only could go to school!"

"I'd just love to go! Missis said at the Home that I would be sent, but seems I can't be spared. I was to start to-day but it's wash-day and I had to stay and help around."

She was much interested in their books; she could read very well in the First Reader, but the price, thirty cents for that, and twenty-five for the Speller, seemed very high.

"Thirty and ten make forty, and ten, fifty, and five, fifty-five. I'm afraid they won't pay out all that for me!" she said.

"Well then," returned Maude, "just sit turn about with Edie and me and study out of our books!"

"That will be lovely!"

"Then we'll call for you to-morrow."

But the next morning when they peeped in at the gate, poor Lottie stood outside the kitchen door at a table industriously polishing knives and forks.

"O Lottie, you will be late," they cried reproachfully.

Hastily brushing her hands on her work apron, Lottie came to the gate; her thin little face looked downcast.

"It's too bad, they are so busy ironing-day I can't be spared, but call in to-morrow and maybe I can go *then*."

They were starting away regretfully when suddenly Edie exclaimed, pointing toward Lottie, "Why just look! Don't Lottie look *funny*?"

"Why, what is it, Oh yes! Lottie your beau-ti-ful long hair!"

"Yes, it's cut off," said Lottie seemingly less concerned than her friends over the loss of her bright locks which had been cut in a straight line below her ears.

"Why *did* you, how could you?"

"It was Mrs. Preston; Miss Claudy said it took too much of my time combing it."

"Didn't you cry?"

"I hated to see it burning in the grate!"

"Why when Carrie Moore had her hair cut off after she was sick, and it was all falling out and wasn't near as pretty as yours, she cried and cried, and her mamma nearly cried too!"

"I guess my mamma would feel bad too, she used to brush and fix it up. When I first went to the Home they were going to cut it off, but the nurse said to wait, maybe some of the ladies who came there looking for

little girls might *fancy* it. But Miss Claudy said it was just ridic'lous for a *bound girl*."

"Do you know, I think she is just hateful," said Maude confidentially.

"An old stick!" added Edie.

"We'll be sure and call for you to-morrow," they cried hurrying off to school.

But the morrow found Lottie peeling apples and seeding raisins.

"To-day is bake-day, I can't be spared, but maybe I can go to-morrow. Let me see what's the lesson for to-morrow."

Alas for to-morrow!

"Comp'ny came to-day so I can't be spared, I must stay and help—but maybe to-morrow——"

"But to-morrow is Friday!"

"It *does* seem funny to start Friday," said Lottie earnestly, "but I do so *long* to go!"

There were tears in her eyes the next morning when she ran to the gate.

"You see girls to-day is cleaning-day, I'll have to do the dusting and maybe it *would* be unlucky to start *Friday*."

"But if you can't start Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday," said Maude, "Or Thursday or Friday," broke in Edie, "What day *can* you start?" they ended in duet.

Lottie looked thoughtful.

"There's no days left but Saturday and Sunday and no school then to start to," observed one of the girls.

"And if there was I'm 'fraid Missis couldn't spare me, for Saturday's awfully busy and Sunday there's always comp'ny. I'm 'fraid I'll never get to start."

Her friends gazed sympathetically at each other and then encouragingly toward their disappointed companion.

"Tell you what, let's all say a little prayer every night that Lottie can be spared," said Edie.

"So she can start," added Maude.

As though in answer to their prayers the Monday morning following found Lottie, with a clean gingham apron, and a blue and white checked sunbonnet and a beaming countenance, ready to join them.

"Isn't it just too lovely!" they chorused.

They drew closer until buff bonnet and pink bonnet and blue checked bonnet touched rims; the voices beneath took a grave tone as one whispered, "I prayed just as hard, as hard!"

"So did I!"

"And I!"

So it was in this way that Lottie finally started to school; but starting and keeping on were quite different things. She loved to go but there were so many tasks for her at "the house"—she never called it "home"—

that many days and sometimes a whole week elapsed while she was marked "absent."

"What else did you get her for if not to help," she overheard Claudia Preston say to her mother, "and all she wants to do is to play with those girls and go to school—the idea!"

"If I *only could* do like the other girls," thought Lottie wistfully. "They can go to school every blessed day, and don't need to wash up after meals or—anything. And if one of them helps her mamma ever so little she praises her and calls her her 'little helper'; wish I was someone's really own girl 'stead of a bound girl."

On the latter score one or two of the girls at school were inclined to elevate their small noses and decline to play with Lottie, but her two friends Maude and Edie stood by her valiantly, always choosing her to play on their side in the games. Recess was Lottie's only time for play; she was obliged to hurry to and from school; if she lingered she would be met with many reproaches at "the house"; besides, she was a faithful little maid and tried to be very punctual in return for the precious privilege of going to school.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCHOOL PICNIC

HE summer vacation commenced in June, and, to celebrate the occasion, the school authorities and teachers held a picnic each year for the scholars at a beautiful grove a mile out of town. As the time approached for the next picnic, it was the leading subject of the school children's conversation.

Lottie was much interested; she learned that all were expected to report at the schoolhouse at an early hour on the day designated; each with a basket of lunch; the bell was to sound at eight o'clock and the march to the grove begin; there swings were up, hammocks hung in shady nooks, and all sorts of games to be indulged in until noon, when the tablecloths were to be spread on the grass, and the good things taken from the baskets. After lunch the fun would begin anew; at six o'clock they were to start homeward after a grand chorus in some of the most popular school songs.

The prospect seemed enchanting to Lottie, more so because unlike the majority of her mates, she was not sure of being allowed to attend.

"Mrs. Preston will be sure to let you go," the girls assured her, "people might be kept home from school but no one *ever* was kept from the picnic!"

This encouraged Lottie to speak of it to the "Missis." Accordingly one evening after carefully drying the dishes and re-setting the table for breakfast she went up to the front porch where the two ladies were enjoying the cool flower perfumed air.

Mrs. Preston was of medium size; her broad full face conveyed the idea of good nature; she was in fact amiable enough if no one troubled her but she would not interfere where doing so might cause friction; she preferred to let things go so that she was not disturbed; in this way her daughter who was as domineering as her parent was yielding, had been allowed to have her own way; Claudia's way was the only way that had ever been considered in that house ever since she was old enough to assert herself; she resembled her mother, but her face in repose was stolid.

Lottie thought Claudia was looking "lovely"; she wore a light lawn dress; her dark hair was brushed back from her forehead in the latest style copied from a fashion magazine. She was bowing and exchanging pleasantries with casual acquaintances who went past the house. When Lottie appeared a timid little figure at the front door, she was smiling very amiably at a young man who loitered for a few minutes' chat; on his going away she

turned around and saw Lottie; the smiles gave place to a frown.

"What do you want *here*?" she cried.

"I just want to ask Missis about the picnic," said Lottie crossing over to that lady's side.

"What picnic? Oh yes, the school picnic. Well what about that?" she asked not unkindly.

"Mayn't I go please?"

"The idea," broke in Claudia, "a whole day's idleness—I thought we would get *some* good out of you in *vacation*!"

Fortunately her attention was distracted by two young ladies stopping at the front gate to call her. Lottie took advantage of the respite.

"Oh please let me go, Mrs. Preston! I needn't bring any lunch, Maude and Edie say they always have plenty in their baskets, and I'll be so 'ndustr'ous to make up."

"Well, we'll see and if you behave yourself until then." Lottie was sent away partly satisfied.

That was Wednesday; the great event was set for the following Tuesday and Lottie worked hard in the meantime trying to earn the partly promised reward. She rubbed the knives and forks until they glistened like silver; she dusted every crevice in each piece of furniture; she worked early and late making special efforts to please but nothing was said at the house about the picnic.

She was permitted to attend school on Monday, that

being the closing day of the term. All the other girls were jubilant over the morrow discussing dress and lunch and play. Lottie listened eagerly but had little to say about *her* plans.

"I'll wear my white and Maude'll wear her pink gingham."

"If I go I'll wear my Sunday dress. It's a lawn with blue flowers; mamma let out the hem last summer and it will be plenty long. I took it out of my box so it will be ready—if——"

"Be sure and ask Mrs. Preston the very first thing this evening and let us know. We'll come to the Little Woman's after supper."

Lottie was almost in a fever during supper time; she ate very little; it seemed there had never before been so many dishes to wash; but at last she was free for the short interval before early bedtime; she ran up stairs, her heart beating fast.

She encountered Mrs. Preston on the stairway.

"Mayn't I go to-morrow?"

"To the picnic—well I suppose so—and——" but a sharp voice interrupted her; Claudia had been listening at the head of the stairs.

"Why mother! you *know* Kate and Daisy Moore are coming to-morrow to spend the day!"

"But I think we can spare——"

"No indeed, we can't let her go just when she's

most needed. She can put that nonsense out of her head."

"O Mrs. Preston!" That lady was in a quandary; she wished to have the child go, but on the other hand Claudia was accustomed to having her own way; Mrs. Preston thought it easier to disappoint Lottie than to incur a spell of Claudia in the "sulks."

"You had better stay at home then, Lottie," she said.

"But ——"

"Mother, here comes Mrs. Edmunds," cried Claudia, and Mrs. Preston turned away. Lottie was left standing disconsolate; she heard Claudia warning her mother in a loud whisper not to "give in" to "that charity girl." "I'm not a 'charity girl,' I'm a bound girl," said Lottie half aloud, to relieve her pent-up feelings; somehow the latter way of putting her bondage was less offensive to her.

She hurried up to her own little room, a partitioned-off corner of the attic; it was lighted by a narrow, curtainless window and carpeted with a strip of matting; its furnishing was meagre—a square box which contained Lottie's clothing, a broken-backed chair, and a narrow cot. A dress somewhat crumpled hung over the footboard; Lottie gazed at it sorrowfully; her beautiful lawn, which she had taken from its narrow quarters and shaken and pressed and laid out all ready to be

put on in the morning! Her tears fell fast on its blue flowered folds.

After a while she returned to the kitchen, and sitting on the steps which led to the back yard with knees crossed and one hand supporting her chin, she gazed away toward the distant hills through a mist of tears. The western sky was a blaze of glory, the river reflected its brilliant tones; the world appeared singularly beautiful, only she was sad.

"The sunset's red—that's the sign of a clear day to-morrow," she murmured to herself.

At that moment the gate swung inward and two bright faces peeped in but the smiles faded as they approached their friend.

"Why Lottie—Crying!"

"Then you can't go. I'm so sorry!"

They crept sympathetically to her side and heard her doleful tale with many exclamations.

"Isn't it too mean!"

"Hateful old thing!"

"Lottie—Lottie—" cried an angry voice and its owner coming hastily to the door had no doubt heard some of the children's complimentary epithets.

"Go up stairs at once with this pitcher of lemonade. You needn't wait girls, it's almost Lottie's bedtime now."

She slammed the door to and gave Lottie a push toward the table. "Those lazy girls are making you

worse than ever if one could imagine *that*. Spill the lemonade do, and break the glasses," she continued as Lottie stumbled in the dark hallway ; but neither of these dire orders was followed, Lottie reached the upper hall in safety.

Since Claudia's departure the visitors in the parlor had been augmented by two young men one of whom Lottie recognized as Mr. Rockwood, the principal of the school.

"Good evening Carlotta. I did not know you lived here," he said when the small waitress entered with her heavy tray of lemonade. He took it from her hand and passed it around. "You will see how dexterous I am, Miss Preston," he rattled on, as Claudia returned to the parlor. "I am used to this kind of work practising at school festivals and picnics !"

Claudia gave him a gay reply ; she was all smiles now ; anyone but Lottie and a few others who had witnessed it might have looked in wonder at the sudden transformation and ask if this could be the same person of a few minutes before. Lottie slipped away to the front porch and finding it deserted ventured to sit in a rocking chair at the farthest corner. The day had been extremely warm but the evening air was delightful, a light breeze having risen ; the rose bushes nodded drowsily, filling the air with their delicious perfume ; the moon was not yet up ; it had grown dark by this time ; the gaslight streamed

from the open door and windows in broad bands across the porch, but Lottie's chair was in the shadow.

The piano sounded a dreamy waltz; some of the young people were dancing; Lottie watched their shadows on the porch as they circled past the windows; she listened to the merry talk and laughter, the music and the humming of insects mingling in a strange and pleasing medley, until gradually the remembrance of her disappointment faded. "I must be getting to bed," she murmured but she did not stir; a few minutes later she was sleeping peacefully.

She was awakened by Mr. Rockwood's voice. "Why Carlotta little girl, I did not see you! I was going to carry you chair and all into the parlor!" he exclaimed.

She jumped up, surprised. "I fell asleep!"

"Asleep lazy child, and here am I wide awake and have to be up at six in the morning! But I declare after all you are a sensible girl to get plenty of rest before our picnic."

"But I'm not going," returned Lottie in a heartbroken tone.

"Not going to our picnic! How dare you insult us by refusing to go?"

"Indeed, indeed it isn't my fault!"

"Whose fault is it, pray?"

"You see Miss Claudia has comp'ny to-morrow and I can't be spared." She tried to speak firmly but the

young man detected the tears in her voice. He stood as if musing.

“Um-m-we’ll have to see about that. Wait here a moment.”

Before the child knew what he intended doing he left her; in a short while he returned accompanied by Miss Preston. It was too dark to perceive any change in the latter’s countenance when Mr. Rockwood led her to where Lottie stood half terrified holding nervously onto the back of her chair.

“Miss Claudia here is Carlotta who refuses to attend my picnic. What punishment does she deserve for her insubordination? I brought you out to pronounce sentence.”

Lottie stood ready to flee at the expected reprimand from Claudia, instead she was astonished when she replied with a rippling laugh: “Why I leave that to you, and I shall coax mamma to let Lottie off for to-morrow.”

“Thank you Miss Preston. Carlotta come forward!” He took Lottie’s cold hand in a kindly clasp. “You are condemned to run off to bed now in order to be at the schoolhouse early in the morning to form in procession with the other culprits and so proceed to the grove linked to a fellow-sufferer by a basket of toothsome edibles. Good night, sleep sound little girl!”

Lottie felt rather scared but very happy as she hurried away. On reaching her room she took her loved frock

in her arms and holding it airily in front of her danced merrily around the rickety chair. On going to bed, she was almost afraid to sleep for fear of not awaking in time; Mrs. Preston generally called her at half past six, but what if she should fail to-morrow. She tried to keep awake by repeating her prayers over and over but she fell asleep at last murmuring, "God bless Mr. Rockwood."

Down stairs when the guests had left Claudia Preston told her mother a tale that would have surprised two persons had they heard it. "That sly Lottie stayed out on the porch to-night to intercept Will Rockwood to get him to ask me about her going to the picnic."

"What did you say?"

"I couldn't very well refuse. I've half a mind to keep her at home to-morrow after all."

But on reflection she decided that it would be better to allow the child to go; if she failed to put in an appearance Mr. Rockwood would very likely ascribe it to her influence, so owing to that Lottie was awakened in good time; she jumped out of bed and ran to the window; the sun, like a great red ball, shone through the light fog; it promised to be a fine day. She dressed herself hurriedly, happy, but unconsciously feeling the absence of loving fingers to fasten a hook here or to straighten a fold there—those sympathetic touches that only love's hands can give.

Maude and Edie came along the street in good time ; they intended to call at Prestons' with a vague hope that some way or other Lottie might be ready to accompany them ; imagine their joy when a little figure with shining eyes and cheeks red with excitement, which had been waiting just inside the gate, jumped out at them crying : " Hurrah — hurrah ! "

" I hoped you would come ! " " We were afraid you couldn't. "

As Maude and Edie lived next door to each other they had packed both lunches in one basket ; they set it down and carefully raised the cover in order to put away Lottie's contribution, a glass of jelly and a jar of pickles, which Mrs. Preston had given her. A glimpse of the good things inside the basket would make one's mouth water but wait and see them in their glory spread out under the trees !

The grove was beautifully situated on the banks of a small stream ; it lacked a dancing platform and band stand but had an abundance of trees and grass. The three girls climbed a hill back of the picnic grounds on a hunt for berries and wild flowers ; they returned looking like " forest nymphs, " as Mr. Rockwood said when he met them in the woods wreathed and decorated with blossoms and vines. The older persons who had accompanied the picnic were sitting in groups reading or chatting ; one old lady who sat at the foot of a tree

with a piece of fancy work in her hands glanced up amused and greeted them; she wore a pretty cap of black lace and purple ribbon on her snowy hair. As they went past Lottie shyly extended a bunch of blue flowers to her which she accepted with a gracious smile.

"Who is your little friend?" she asked the other girls with whom she seemed to be acquainted.

"Lottie — Carlotta Lake."

"Carlotta — Oh yes — Thank you dear!"

"Who is she?" whispered Lottie when they resumed their walk.

"Mr. Rockwood's mother."

"Is that Mr. Rockwood's mother?"

She glanced back; the lady was still watching them; she gave Lottie a parting smile which added to the day's happiness; Lottie was glad that she had given her the flowers.

They had a lovely time, the "very loveliest in the world" as Edie said, when on their way home they paused, tired but happy at the Little Woman's house; they divided the spoils into three equal parts, first arranging a tiny bouquet of bright buds and ivy vines for the Little Woman.

After good-byes had been said Lottie entered the house carrying her precious offering; she felt that she was bringing a portion of the day's joy back with her in the shape of those flowers for Mrs. Preston and Claudia who had missed the picnic.

The elder lady was not at home ; Claudia was preparing tea ; her two guests had been obliged to leave early and Lottie's help had not been missed. "Rubbish," she exclaimed when Lottie came in at the door. "Throw it away ! those daisies take root everywhere so be careful to carry them outside the yard ! You are the queerest girl !"

Lottie did not dare to disobey ; she took the flowers to a near-by alley-way and set them down in the shade of a bush. "I can come out and look at 'em to-morrow anyway," she thought.

Maude's and Edie's flowers were received gladly and hung around the picture frames and decorated the vases for several days just in the way Lottie would have disposed of hers had she been some one's "really own" girl. As it was she did not grieve overmuch—you see it happened on that happy picnic day.

CHAPTER III.

THE GARNET BROOCH



URING the three months' vacation Maude and Edie had an enjoyable time which would have been still happier if their friend Lottie had been permitted to join in their play; it was only at rare intervals that she could spend an hour with them, but almost every day she came out for a few minutes' meeting at the Little Woman's house.

"What do you do all day?" queried Maude on one occasion.

"Mrs. Preston wants a new rag carpet and I sew all afternoon; it's nice work though. I like it better than dishwashing. It's nice to see the balls a growing and to sew the pretty pieces together."

"I hate dishwashing!" cried Edie, "but in vacation I often dry the dishes."

"So do I. One day I ironed some towels and mamma said I did them beautifully," cried Maude.

Poor Lottie, no one ever praised her work no matter how carefully she tried to do it, no one ever told

her she did anything beautifully, but then she was only a bound girl.

Sometimes she was obliged to sit for a whole morning seeding cherries or plums or preparing vegetables in the kitchen while the family was in the upper part of the house. Claudia would run down occasionally to remark on Lottie's slowness: "Not through yet, why what have you been doing?" or, "Taking your time as usual! I never saw such a slow poke!" But she never sat down to help the child in her wearisome tasks. It was always Claudia who had a new piece of work ready for her, and it was Claudia who made her labor beyond her strength.

"Don't bend over that way, Lottie," said one of her friends when Lottie came out one evening with a noticeable stoop in her shoulders, "Mamma says we should hold our backs straight."

Lottie straightened up with a sigh. "It's hard to 'member that when one is so tired. I had to scrub the kitchen oilcloth on my hands and knees. It's such a big floor and my hands get quite stiff in the water! Oh dear, there's Miss Claudy calling me and I only just came out!" she said as they heard a voice screaming, "Lottie—Lot-t-i-e—," and before Lottie could answer, its owner had reached the gate.

"Lottie, did you see my garnet brooch anywhere?" she cried excitedly.

"No, Miss."

"I cannot find it——"

"Oh is it lost, that lovely breastpin!"

"*Is* it lost! The last I saw it was when I left it on my dresser this morning. No one has been in my room since then but *you*!" Her voice kept rising until it ended in a passionate screech.

"Indeed I haven't seen it," began Lottie, but Claudia interrupted, "I sent you to my room for my white waist so that I could do it up."

"Yes, I know; the waist was lying across a chair by the window. I got it but I never even looked around 'cause you were in such a hurry for it."

"You couldn't help but see it. If it isn't found soon I'll send for Policeman Jones and have the thief arrested."

She seized Lottie by the arm and hurried her into the house; the other girls heard her angry tones until the door was closed with a bang; they gazed at each other frightened.

"Does she think Lottie took it?" whispered Maude.

"Sounds like it—mean old thing—but I hope she will find it soon!"

"Would she send Lottie to jail I wonder."

"I'm afraid so and it's full of rats——"

"Yes, and damp and dark. I peeped in there one day." Shuddering, they ran home with their direful news.

"Send Lottie up to me," directed Mrs. Preston when she heard her daughter's noisy entrance. Lottie was given a shove that started her up the stairway at the head of which her mistress waited looking very stern.

"Come in here," she said, leading the way to the parlor. She seated herself in an easy chair, while Lottie stood in front of her, wondering what it all meant.

"Now Lottie it is no use to pretend to me that you have not seen Miss Claudia's brooch."

"Indeed, Mrs. Preston, I didn't see it to-day."

"When did you see at last?"

"It was that night Miss Claudy went to the lawn fete; she was dressed in white and the pin shone just lovely every time she moved."

"She tells me you always admired it."

"Yes it was so beaut'ful. Can't it be found *anywhere*?"

"We have hunted all over the house."

After a few minutes she continued: "But you go and hunt it, Lottie. I think you will find it!"

"Yes, and look in your own room," added Miss Preston coming in, "Who hides, finds."

Her mother signified her to keep silent and sent Lottie away on her new task.

The latter strangely enough did not understand from their, to her, enigmatic words that she was suspected of taking the ornament; she set about the hunt in good faith,

with as great eagerness as a gold hunter might display in locating a vein; up stairs and down in every possible and impossible place, including her own corner of the attic as she had been bidden, "'Though how it could get here unless it flew I can't see," she mused.

In vain! She was obliged to return to the parlor at the expiration of a half hour to announce her unsucccess.

Mrs. Preston had been advising her daughter to wait patiently that Lottie would surely return her pin but Claudia was not so hopeful.

"I can't find it anywhere!" exclaimed Lottie.

"I told you so," Claudia said to her mother, "She's too sneaking to ——"

Lottie failed to hear the words; what seemed to her a brilliant idea had just entered her mind.

"I know the very thing to do now," she cried, "I'll go up to Miss Claudy's room and try again."

Mrs. Preston and Claudia followed her; they were confident that Lottie would go direct to where the brooch was concealed; they stood in the doorway of Claudia's room while Lottie advanced to the centre; her face glowed excitedly; she spat on her left hand and singing out, "Spit, spit spy, tell me where that brooch does lie," she struck her palm with the other hand then she marched toward the window as indicated by the charm.

Claudia and Mrs. Preston followed fully expecting her to produce the pin but alas the charm did not work!

Lottie got down on her knees and searched but found no trace of the brooch.

When Claudia realized that Lottie really would not return it her rage knew no bounds.

"You imp, do you think to impose on us with all this foolery?" she cried, "I told mamma how it would be, she can see for herself now! Do you hear me? Tell me what you did with my brooch!"

"I!"

"Yes, you—you stole it—no—no need to deny it—I've seen you watching it every time I've worn it."

"It was so pretty! I never thought of taking it though. Oh," cried the child in a passion of tears, "did you think I would be so mean!"

"Go back to your work now Lottie, I expected different things from you," commanded Mrs. Preston, grieved to have her own peace thus disturbed.

"And make up your mind to go to prison if you don't return my pin," called Claudia.

The days that followed were miserable ones for the child; they tried in every way to make her confess having taken the brooch but Claudia's threats and Mrs. Preston's coaxing failed to have effect except to make Lottie more terrified and nervous.

She saw Maude and Edie the third day after the loss but only for a few minutes.

"Don't you ever make faces at that Claudy?" in-

quired Maude. "Why if I were you I'd make so many faces that my face would be set this way," then she looked so fierce that they all laughed together despite the gravity of the affair.

"Mamma says the brooch is just lying around somewhere. One day she lost her gold ring and she hunted and hunted, turned the house upside down, but had to give it up and the next day she found it in the bureau right where she had looked a dozen times!" Edie said.

"What kind of a looking pin was it?"

"It was round and all covered with little red stones. I do wish it would let itself be found!"

Lottie was called away just as Mr. Rockwood came up the street.

"Why did Carlotta run away so scared looking?" he asked the girls.

"Why Claudy Preston called her, and no wonder she's scared. They are going to have her arrested."

"And sent to jail!"

In that way Mr. Rockwood heard for the first time of Lottie's disgrace.

"I am sorry but I do not think Carlotta is in fault. She does not look like a wicked girl, I must see what I can do" was all he said. He was however very indignant to hear of the harsh measures taken against her.

Lottie had been called to carry a pitcher of ice water

to the parlor where two elderly lady friends of Mrs. Preston were being entertained; when the little girl appeared one of the visitors who was small and thin shook her head sorrowfully, the other who was large and fat heaved a prodigious sigh; then they looked at each other and shook their heads and sighed in unison. Under different circumstances Lottie would have thought that some of their friends were dead but now she had a vague feeling that all this pantomime related to her.

When she was through she was relieved to get away from them; she sat on the steps in the lower hall; presently she heard them taking leave.

"It is risky business taking strange children into one's home," a voice said. "One never knows what they are," said another. "I believe I remember the brooch; didn't you use to wear it Jennie?" This question was addressed to Mrs. Preston. "Yes, mamma gave it to me," answered Claudia. The truth of the matter was that Claudia had coveted the pin ever since she was old enough to wear it; then she borrowed it on every occasion, until at last she forgot to return it; she had kept it for so long that she now considered it her own property. It had been a gift to Mrs. Preston from her mother and she had worn it with pride for many years, as it was a quaint and beautiful thing and its old-fashioned setting added to its beauty; although she was glad to loan it to Claudia at any time she rather resented her appropriating it; she was too yielding to

assert her claim however and Claudia had her own way as usual.

“I wonder where she has it concealed,” observed one of the visitors. “Here comes William Rockwood, we will have his escort up street,” cried the other.

They rustled away amid a chorus of good-byes. Lottie heard them greeting Mr. Rockwood at the gate and his deeper tones in reply. It added to her bitterness to know that he would learn of her disgrace; it never occurred to her that he would believe in her and that he would not condemn her without a hearing.

Mr. Rockwood parted with the ladies when their different ways branched off and continued his journey home. He lived at the extreme upper end of town in a pretty white frame two-storied house, bounded in front by a flowered grass plot and at one side by a pathway bordered with myrtle which led to the old-fashioned garden in the rear; when the front and back doors of the centre hall were open as on this particular day, it afforded a pleasant vista of grape arbors and trees and farther away the hills sloping gently to the blue skies.

The mistress of the house was busy concocting some dainty for the evening meal when her son sought her out. He told her of Lottie's trouble.

“Mother, I wish you would call at the Prestons and see what you can do for Carlotta. I should do so myself but I think it would be useless. I know Miss

Preston resented my interfering about the picnic although she pretended otherwise."

"I'll see what I can do. I remember meeting Carlotta at the picnic, she seemed to be a bright child."

"She *is* bright. Her standing at school is excellent, but she is absent so often that she has had a poor chance so far. Do you know, mother, I have often wished you could get her from the Prestons. She would have an opportunity to develop properly with you."

"Perhaps you are partial my son," returned the lady, gazing fondly at her tall son.

"You could bring me forward as an example of your upbringing, no one could resist that," he said laughingly. "But seriously, mother mine, a child of Carlotta's age would be company for you and there would be no danger of her being overworked here."

"I would undertake the charge gladly. I think she would be contented with us; but it is a delicate matter, the Prestons may consider me overofficious. I can at least try."

Accordingly, next day Mrs. Rockwood made the promised call. She found both ladies at home. During their conversation the loss of the brooch was recounted. They gave their reasons for suspecting Lottie:—her great admiration of the trinket and its disappearance just after she had been in Claudia's room. "I think it was natural for her to admire the brooch," said Mrs.

Rockwood, "you know all children love to handle one's rings and pretty things. Besides one cannot be absolutely certain of having put or seen a thing in a particular place. At times I feel positive that I placed my spectacles in my workbox and after a long search there they are on my head! Perhaps you may find your brooch in the same way Miss Preston."

"I wish I could, indeed, but it looks suspicious."

"Still as long as you have no direct evidence against her I would at least wait and see."

"Of course you don't know her as well as we do. Poor mamma has been so kind, and I, too, have been lenient, remembering her antecedents."

"Then you know her people?"

"Not exactly. The managers of the Home knew very little about her in fact."

"It seems that after her husband's death Lottie's mother took in sewing. A sudden illness carried her off; they could find no trace of her people so the child was taken to the Home a few weeks before I went there," said Mrs. Preston.

"A sad case, but poverty does not imply crime you know," Mrs. Rockwood remarked, and after a while she asked, "Do you think of returning her to the asylum?"

"Well not at present ——"

"Let me know if you should decide to do so please, I may be able to provide for her in some other manner."

“Oh, mamma has taken her until she is of age, so it is not probable that she will send her away; besides she may produce my brooch some day,” said Claudia who had no desire to lose Lottie’s help, especially now that others were interested in her.

Finding that her efforts in Lottie’s behalf were useless Mrs. Rockwood changed the subject and soon took her leave.

Several days passed. Mr. Rockwood looked for Lottie every time he went past the Prestons. He hoped to meet her on the street but he failed to see her; nor was she to be seen playing at the Little Woman’s house. Her two little friends were there quite frequently and he assured them of his belief in Lottie, which tidings they conveyed to her.

She had been absent on an errand during Mrs. Rockwood’s call and nothing was said in her hearing about it, though in private Claudia expressed her indignation at “that old busybody’s” interference.

The sympathy of her two girl companions and the knowledge of Mr. Rockwood’s interest afforded Lottie great consolation. She was daily subjected to much humiliation by Mrs. Preston’s martyr-like sighs, and by the younger lady’s innuendoes. The threat of arrest overhung her waking hours and troubled her dreams. Going outside the house on errands no longer was a source of joy. A group collected around a street organ or any other un-

wonted noise or crowd terrified her, she imagined it was the policeman coming for her. Therefore she sought the most out of the way side streets, and hurried on her way and back to the house glad to reach the shelter of its walls, where the atmosphere, though unpleasant, was better than that of the jail.

Often at night in her little bare room she took from her box a tiny object which glittered in the light of the candle. It was a golden locket which contained the pictures of her parents. How longingly she gazed at them, how she missed them now, especially her mother whose memory was more distinct in her mind. Sometimes instead of replacing the locket in the box she would put it around her neck by the narrow ribbon attached and wear it all night. It comforted her somewhat and kept her from feeling so lonely after she had blown out the light and the room was in darkness, except on moonlight nights when the moonbeams stole in at the window; occasionally the moon himself peeped in like a jolly old friend and found her kneeling at the bedside praying for the recovery of the brooch and he would watch over her until she went to bed and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THE GIRLS FOUND

“**W**ELL school begins on Monday,” observed Edie one fine afternoon in late August. “I got my books ready, all packed up to start.”

“I wonder if Lottie is going.”

“We must stop and see.”

They were on their way to the Little Woman’s house. There had been quite a severe storm the day previous, the gutter overflowing so that they had been anxious concerning their tiny friend. But it seemed she was unharmed, everything was as usual except for a few stones and weeds that had drifted in.

“We’ll clean them away after we call Lottie,” said Maude.

They opened the gate gently; no sign of anyone around; then Edie gave a soft whistle that no boy of her age could improve on; they waited a moment then whistled again more shrilly; presently Lottie’s blonde head popped out the door.

“Hello girls!”

“Hello!”

"Can't you come out?"

She shook her head negatively, and held up a paring knife in one hand and a potato in the other.

"Try and come out after while. We are going to do some work for the Little Woman."

"I'll try but I'm awful busy."

"We want to talk about going to school too."

The eager face clouded perceptibly.

"I don't know yet girls, but I'll be out in half an hour maybe, or maybe not till to-morrow."

"Good-bye!" "Good-bye!" With a parting flourish of the potato she was gone.

The others returned to their task. While they busied themselves a gay party came along. A crowd of young people had met at the post-office where they daily went for mail and their paths leading the same way they returned together with merry talk and laughter. Among them was Mr. Rockwood.

He noticed the two little girls making frantic efforts to reach into the spout with a stick.

"What are you doing little ones?" he inquired.

"There's something fastened in there; we can feel it with the stick but it's too far in to see what 'tis."

"And this stick just won't stir it, it's not long enough."

"Try my cane," cried one of the young men obligingly.



"A BREASTPIN, I DECLARE!"

The crowd halted in a good-natured way more intent on their own fun than on the children's play.

"I'll expect you to divide the spoils," said the owner of the cane.

"That's just like you Clarence, never to do a good action without a promised reward," remarked one of the ladies teasingly.

"Here it comes now," cried Maude.

"What, my reward?"

"Oh look!"

They all crowded around to see the small object in the child's hand.

"A breastpin, I declare!" exclaimed one of the crowd.

"That is Claudia Preston's lost brooch, I know it well," one of the young women declared.

Sure enough there it was, no worse for its journey down the spout, the garnet brooch whose loss had occasioned so much unhappiness!

"The Little Woman brought it! Hurrah! Hur-rah!" cried Maude and Edie dancing with joy.

"Hurrah," returned Mr. Rockwood no less pleased. "Come, all you good people and we will return it to its owner."

They all followed him up to the Prestons' front door. The two little girls first tried the gate, intending to notify Lottie at once but it had become in some way

fastened so they joined the crowd. They trooped into the yard a laughing crowd, everybody seemed to be talking at once. The unusual excitement attracted several small boys who hung on the outskirts of the procession and stood waiting at the gate to see what was going to happen.

Mr. Rockwood rang the door bell. Presently the door was opened by Miss Preston.

"Is this a surprise party?" she asked smilingly, inviting them to enter.

"Yes, a very pleasant one for you and Carlotta," explained Mr. Rockwood, producing the brooch.

"My brooch!"

"Yes indeed, Claudia. You must have lost it in the wash. You know you told me you did up your waist yourself that day it was lost. No doubt it was sticking in the waist and fell out and was washed away in the water," said the girl who had identified the pin. Then they told how it had been found.

"I really must reward the children," Claudia said after a while, though she had no intention of ever so doing.

"We don't want any reward," declared Edie stoutly. "We are so glad you can't have Lottie arrested now for stealing it."

"Arrested, what nonsense! Lottie knew I never thought of such a thing!"

"But you told her ——" began Maude when Claudia interrupted addressing Mr. Rockwood, "Just at first I thought Lottie might have taken it out of childish curiosity intending to return it, but when she did not do so at once I knew she had not touched it. I am so glad it has been found."

She was indeed delighted but felt chagrined that after all the talk Lottie was proven innocent.

"Where is Lottie now?" asked Maude.

"Down stairs somewhere. You girls run around to the other gate and tell her the news," replied Claudia graciously.

"But the gate is locked."

"In that case I'll call her." Claudia went to the head of the stairs and called softly, "Lottie." No one answered. Never had Lottie's name been breathed so sweetly by Miss Preston in all the months that Lottie had been an inmate of the house, but her calling brought no response. Then she went down stairs and up to Lottie's room but found no sign of her anywhere. Mrs. Preston who had been taking a nap awoke and assured her she had not sent the child on an errand, on the contrary she had left her busy in the kitchen half an hour previous.

In the meantime all the visitors had departed except Mr. Rockwood and the two little girls who waited to see Lottie.

"I cannot find her anywhere," announced Claudia, "Girls, you run up to Blacks' and Ellisons', she may have gone there to play." "She never plays with anyone but Maude and me," said Edie. However, they obeyed Miss Preston's instructions. No one at either house had seen Lottie nor could they discover any trace of her in the alley-way. They returned disappointed to the house. Mr. Rockwood then volunteered to visit the neighboring stores, but his search too, was unsuccessful, Mrs. Preston found none of Lottie's belongings missing except her bonnet.

"It seems that your mother left Lottie busy in the kitchen about half past three o'clock. Maude and Edie spoke to her at perhaps a quarter of an hour later, that would be at three-forty-five, just before we came up from the post-office. Shortly after that time, say twenty-five minutes later or about four-fifteen, she is missing. She must have quit the house at four o'clock," the young man said.

They were all assembled in the parlor. Maude and Edie clinging close together half frightened. Everyone was beginning to feel uneasy.

"Maybe she has run away," ventured Edie in a half whisper. "One day we asked what she would do if the policeman came and she said, 'Why I'd run off.'"

"She knew I was merely joking about sending for an officer and that she had no intention of going is proved

by her failure to take her clothes along," Claudia answered sharply.

"She even left her locket that she was very fond of," added Mrs. Preston.

Mr. Rockwood arose. "We must institute a searching party," he said, "But first I shall run home for a few minutes or mother will be worried. I may have the good fortune to meet Lottie on my way."

"I hope so!"

"If not I shall return in an hour. It is now half past five."

He took his leave. The two girls accompanied him as far as the gate where they said good-bye. Maude and Edie went down street to their homes and the young man journeyed up the hill to his. They all kept a sharp lookout but they found no trace of Lottie.

CHAPTER V.

THE RUNAWAY



OTTIE was still busy preparing vegetables for supper when she heard the bell ring. She dried her hands carefully, put on a clean apron over her working dress, and ran up to the front hall, for it was her duty to answer the bell unless she was instructed to the contrary.

Through the etched glass at each side of the door she caught a glimpse of many shadowy forms. A sudden fear thrilled her. Could it be the policeman who had come to arrest her?

Had the crowd accompanied him in the way she had once seen curious people following a man who had been arrested, to watch her going to jail?

She hesitated at the closed door for an instant, her heart beating loudly. She heard muffled tones without, that in her nervous state of mind sounded menacing; footsteps seemed to press nearer to the door; she turned and fled down the stairway; grabbing her sunbonnet from its hook on the kitchen wall she ran into the yard and out

of the gate, not the one close to the Little Woman's house but one which led to the alley.

Here she paused breathless. Where should she go? Not daring to lose any time she turned at last to the right and ran along the alley, away from the house and up the hill.

The farther she got away from her starting point the more secure she felt but she did not slacken her speed. At the top of the alley was a street where many stores were located; she crossed this street and followed it for a short distance until another side street branched off which led after many windings to the country road over which the school children had marched on that memorable picnic day, when she had been so happy with no dark cloud of suspicion and fear to make her tremble.

Instinctively she made her way in that direction now, although when she quit the house she had no thought of so doing; she was glad that her indefinite steps had led her this way, for out in the country in the fields and woods was liberty! She thought regretfully of her loved locket which she had had no time to secure, and the tears came into her eyes for she felt that she was leaving forever her little friends Maude and Edie and the Little Woman, without even saying good-bye. But surely they would understand and forgive her, and think she did right to run away from that dreadful prison where the darkness and the rats tormented those shut in by strong barred doors.

Just where the town ended the road led past several residences pleasantly situated between country and town, having the advantages of both in being close enough to stores and churches, still possessing spacious gardens, and beautiful views of wide stretching pastureland and towering tree-covered hills.

On her former trip past those houses Lottie had admired them very much, especially one of white frame where the roses and myrtle ran riot, which she had picked out as the kind of a place she would choose for a home "when she got rich," but now she did not even glance toward it, but kept her sunbonnet turned resolutely straight to the front.

In this way she failed to see a lady who sat by a downstairs window in the very house she had thought so pretty. The lady was busily plying her needle, not too much engrossed with it however to escape seeing any occasional passer-by and at last she espied a small figure in a great check apron and a sunbonnet, which hid her face, speeding along the dusty way.

She watched the child idly for a moment not recognizing her, but after a while something in the poise of her head, something in her whole appearance recalled somebody she ought to know, could it be the little girl Carlotta? If so she would hail her. She had no opportunity to verify her fancy for the bonnet concealed its wearer's features and she did not glance around. She had reached the



“OH, MRS. ROCKWOOD, IS IT YOU?”

house and was hurrying past when suddenly the watcher threw aside her work and hurried out of the front door and down the pathway to the gate.

“Carlotta!” she cried but the child paid no attention, on the contrary she increased her gait although she must have heard her name called.

The lady experienced a sudden uneasiness; there was something unusual in the way the little girl flew along unheedful of everything; she felt that something was wrong.

She hailed her again more loudly with the same result. Baffled but determined she opened the gate and hurried after the runaway. She gained enough to materially decrease the distance between them and then called again, “Lottie, Carlotta!”

The child did not pause but she turned her head. Instead of the boisterous crowd of boys with the policeman which she had expected to see she met the friendly gaze of an old lady with snowy hair whose cap ribbons were flying in the breeze.

Lottie stopped in her mad flight and went back to meet her.

“Oh, Mrs. Rockwood, is it you?” she cried in a tone of almost sobbing relief.

“Why child, you led me a race, I can hardly get my breath. Why didn’t you stop when I first called?”

“I was afraid!”

“*Afraid*—what—of *me*?”

“No, not of you! I thought they were coming to arrest me!”

“Is that the reason you look so terrified, poor child, you are almost exhausted! Come home with me and rest a while and tell me all about it,” said Mrs. Rockwood taking Lottie’s little feverish hand in hers and turning toward home.

But Lottie drew back. “No, no, I don’t dare to go. I must hurry on or they will catch me. Listen, I hear a noise!”

“That is only a country wagon, my dear. In any case no one would dare to molest you while I am near.”

“But I must hurry on!”

“Where did you think of going, Carlotta?”

“I don’t know where exactly—to the picnic grounds I guess. There are so many lovely hiding places there!”

“Now little girl don’t be foolish, that is out of the question. Do you think you would be safer there when the dark night comes than with me? Come and I can hide you if necessary, but they will never think of looking for you at my house.”

Mrs. Rockwood retained possession of Lottie’s hand while the latter at first unwillingly but at last almost gladly suffered herself to be led to the house.

“Why, just think, it is the very house I picked out for myself,” she cried in surprise when they turned in

at the gate. When they reached the cool shelter of the dwelling Mrs. Rockwood led her charge to the sitting-room and bade her sit down on an old-fashioned sofa. Then she removed Lottie's bonnet and brushed the damp ringlets away from her heated brow.

The unaccustomed tenderness, the caressing words of her protector, the kindly attentions which recalled the sweet care of her dead mother, made the nervous tension which had carried Lottie through the exciting events of the last hour to give way, and leaning her head against Mrs. Rockwood's shoulder she cried heartily.

That lady did not attempt to quiet her, and at last her sobbing ceased and she was able to tell her story to sympathizing ears.

Mrs. Rockwood soon understood the painful position which Lottie had filled ever since her coming to the Prestons as a bound girl, and the constant fear and humiliation of the last few weeks.

Her heart ached as she listened, and she clasped the child's form more closely wishing that she might keep her always; she knew that Claudia Preston would not consent to part with her so she said nothing to the child of her wish but comforted her as well as she could.

After a while she said, "Well, Carlotta, come up stairs and bathe your hands and face, that will cool you off while I get supper. My son will be home directly,

and we will see what is best to be done. You need have no fears of arrest, the idea is absurd."

"But that crowd at the door, Mrs. Rockwood!"

"Perhaps your fears exaggerated the size of the crowd, it may have been some people to call on the ladies," returned Mrs. Rockwood as they entered a small room on the second floor.

"What a pretty, pretty room!" exclaimed Lottie, "It looks like the blue room in a story the girls and I were reading!"

It was indeed a dainty apartment, with blue and white matting on the floor and the walls papered with a neat design in the same colors; the curtains were white with delicate blue sprigs; they were looped back from the windows which opened toward the back of the house giving views of the garden and the hills. The bed was a small brass one with a white fringed cover, and there was a quaint oak dresser with an oval mirror above and a washstand holding a pitcher and bowl ornamented with blue flowers. On the walls were a few pictures with inexpensive frames, at one side of the bed was one called "Wide Awake," which displayed two chubby urchins looking out to say, "Good morning," while its companion picture, "Fast Asleep," hung on the opposite side showing the same subjects slumbering peacefully. A few chairs, one, a willow rocker, beside a small table on which was a reading lamp completed the furnishing of the room.

Lottie washed her hands and face and brushed her hair, feeling for the moment like the princess in a fairy tale. She walked around the room admiring each object, pausing at the window to gaze without and finally sat down on the rocking chair, feeling so content, so safe and happy.

If only it could last! If this were her "really own" room! If she might stay there always with dear kind Mrs. Rockwood and her son!

CHAPTER VI.

PLEASANT SURPRISES

HAT lady down stairs was wishing the same thing. How it would brighten the house to have Carlotta running through it, and filling it with the merry laughter of childhood.

“That little room just suits her and she admires it so much. I’m afraid she has been very unhappy at the Prestons, though her childish capacity for happiness made her almost unmindful of her position until in the last few weeks. Claudia Preston must be a heartless girl and yet once I fancied Will admired her! How sorry I would feel now if I still thought so!”

She spread the table for tea, taking out her fragile cups and saucers and placing a tall vase of flowers in the centre. She set on an old-fashioned silver basket filled with small cakes and a pretty crystal dish of delicious honey. Then there were cool looking vegetables and a plate of home-made bread, while the tea simmered and the steak waited to be broiled in the small out-kitchen.

After a while Mrs. Rockwood heard the clicking of the gate and her son came into the house breathless.

"Mother, Carlotta's lost, just give me a cup of coffee and I'm off to search for her," he cried excitedly.

"Carlotta! Lost!" said the lady in what to her son sounded a very uninterested tone.

"I must hurry," he exclaimed. "We must find her before night comes on."

"But Will, you can't run off in that way. I have a guest for supper."

"Yes, I see," he said, glancing at the extra touches she had given the table. He wondered at his mother's indifference. "Please make my excuses, as for me I will not feel easy until Carlotta is found. And just to think mother, that miserable brooch was found about the time she left the Prestons!"

"Found," cried Mrs. Rockwood with no lack of enthusiasm in her voice now.

There was a rush of footsteps in the stairway. Carlotta on her way down had heard the young man's concluding sentence. She rushed toward him her eyes shining.

"Found? O dear Mr. Rockwood *is* it true? *is* it really found?" she cried joyfully.

"Found, found! The brooch and now the girl! Mother you sly creature, no wonder my first piece of

news didn't upset you, I wondered at your calmness. Carlotta how glad I am to find you here!"

"Well come to supper, everything is getting cold," broke in Mrs. Rockwood, so while they all enjoyed the meal the young man told his tale.

"It was the Little Woman who brought it back," declared Lottie, "How glad Maude and Edie must have been!"

"How relieved they will be when they hear that you, too, are found; but it was *this* Little Woman who found *you*," returned Mr. Rockwood, indicating his mother.

The latter smiled. "I'll tell you all about that later Will," she said.

How they all enjoyed that meal, especially Lottie who was too happy and excited to feel at all shy. The atmosphere of their sympathy which enveloped her made her seem like a different child from the little bound girl who ate her meals alone and in haste at the Prestons.

After supper while Lottie was out in the garden Mrs. Rockwood related to her son the happenings of the afternoon.

"Poor little girl she really did run off then! I imagined when I saw her here that she had come for a visit without obtaining permission, but I saw later that something was being held back."

"Will, must we return her to the Prestons!" exclaimed the lady sorrowfully after a while.

"I am afraid so mother, I dislike the thought as much as you do but as you found out not long ago, they will not consent to part with her. It is a pity, poor child, she would be quite happy here with you."

"Yes, from the first we were drawn to each other. It seems cruel to send her away!"

"Perhaps they will treat her more kindly now," was the young man's reply, more to comfort his mother than to express his own opinion. "I tell you mother, supposing you send a note to Mrs. Preston stating that Carlotta is with you and that you will bring her home in the morning. Under the circumstances they can't very well object to that. Everything will be better to-morrow, besides Carlotta will not dread the return so much now that the pin has been recovered."

There was nothing else to be done; Mrs. Rockwood assented and a small boy was sent with the note.

It occasioned great relief to Mrs. Preston who received it, and in the absence of Claudia, who had gone down street toward the post-office in the hope of encountering Lottie, she was compelled to act on her own responsibility and agreed to the arrangement.

Claudia on her return was very indignant.

"If I had been here I would have gone and fetched her back at once. Meddlesome old thing, I can see she just wants to get her from us. Perhaps she induced her to run away!"

“Well, we must let it go now, but when Lottie returns you need not scold her, it was your own persecution and nagging which drove her away.”

Miss Preston gazed in amazement at her mother not, however, more surprised at her outburst than was that lady herself. She had been carried away, the excitement of the afternoon had stirred up all self-assertion that remained after years of suppression. While Claudia stood speechless she noticed her mother fingering nervously something at her throat, could it be the garnet brooch! Mrs. Preston arose adding hastily, “And Claudia I have decided to wear my brooch myself, after all, it is more suited to my years and I will buy you a more modern one.” She quitted the room hurriedly, feeling like a culprit, while Claudia vanquished for once in an encounter with her parent stood as if rooted to the floor asking herself if her mother had gone crazy.

To return to Lottie. She had not dreamed of being permitted to remain permanently, nor that such an arrangement would be desired by the Rockwoods. “If only I might,” had been the extent of her musing. The return to her so-called home was not so much dreaded now that the heavy load of suspicion was removed from her shrinking childish shoulders. She felt like another person and when Mrs. Rockwood told her she was to remain there over night her surprise was only equaled by her delight.

“How kind you are! How lovely to stay till to-morrow! I wonder if the girls know where I am.”

“Yes, the boy was told to go to their house but he met them outside the Prestons’ gate. They were very much pleased; they could hardly wait until to-morrow to see you.”

Lottie played and danced around the garden until twilight when she went and sat on the porch at Mrs. Rockwood’s feet. They had a confidential talk until the return of that lady’s son who had a business engagement for the evening. He was pleased with the picture presented by the old lady and the child sitting happily together, instead of his mother solitary and perhaps lonely as she must often be in his absence, though she never complained nor had she any desire to chain him to the house, so he too wished vainly that Carlotta might stay.

“Carlotta, I’m afraid my nose is out of joint,” he said playfully tweaking one of her curls.

Carlotta took his words literally. “Oh, Mr. Rockwood! But it *looks* all right and straight!” she said eying that feature doubtfully.

“Well, little girl, you needn’t run for the arnica bottle. I think I may get used to it in time,” he answered. Mrs. Rockwood came to Lottie’s relief by explaining her son’s meaning, adding, “He is frightfully jealous you see, my dear.”

Lottie laughed, a gay, happy laugh which had a mixture of childish mischievousness new to it, she glanced mirthfully at the young man, "Let his nose *stay* out of joint then," she said.

Bedtime came at last and Lottie fell asleep in the brass bed in the pretty blue room while the kind old lady hovered around seeing that she was comfortably fixed, and the child between sleeping and waking imagined that it was her mother who had come back to care for and to bless her.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHAT ABOUT LOTTIE



NE cold evening in the following November, Mr. Rockwood and his mother sat beside the table in their cozy sitting-room. A bright fire burned in the grate glowing on the polished fender; it was reflected in a few tasteful pictures which adorned the walls and brought out the warm red tones of carpet and curtains.

The young man was reading a newspaper by the light of a lamp whose old-fashioned paper shade displayed a woodland scene with sheep and dancing shepherdesses in contrast to the wintry landscape without. Occasionally he read aloud some item of interest to his mother who occupied an easy chair on the other side of the table busy with her knitting needles. She did not seem to pay much attention to the reading and only mechanically to her work, her mind was evidently engrossed by something else. Presently she remarked, "I saw Carlotta to-day."

"Indeed!" answered her son inquiringly laying aside his paper.

“Yes, I went down to the store to match some wool, and met her running along the street, and spoke to her. She was very much pleased to see me.”

“She seems to be an affectionate child. I see her occasionally at the school, but her teacher tells me she attends very irregularly.”

“I asked her why she never came to see us and she looked so pitiful, I was sorry for having put the question. It seems she has often asked permission to come but there is no time for visiting. ‘Something is sure to turn up to keep me busy the very time I thought I could go’ she explained. I do not think she is happy at the Prestons.”

“Mrs. Preston appears to be of a very plastic disposition, incapable of acting for herself, while, in my opinion, Claudia is very hard for a young girl.”

“She impressed me in the same way and yet there was a time, Will, when I thought you rather — admired her.”

The young man gave his mother a frank smiling glance.

“Well, mother dear, I *did* admire Miss Preston without attaching any serious thought to the matter, until the night before our picnic when I persuaded her to let Carlotta attend, then I detected under her seeming gaiety a harshness which I did not think was downright cruelty, until her persecution of that friendless child brought it out. One could excuse hardness in a woman who has

lived long and suffered much, but in a young person like Claudia Preston who has a good home and enjoys every advantage an indulgent mother can give, it shows a character in itself repellent."

"After that lecture, William, I see that you do not admire Miss Claudia. One does not *dissect* where one loves."

"*Love*, that is another thing, mother. I shall fall in love only when I meet a girl as sweet and sensible as the one my father loved."

"Flatterer, I guess that is a bribe for some of that cake I baked to-day."

"I can never hope to find your equal in the art of fashioning delicious things out of flour, sugar, eggs, etc. But that cake did look uncommonly good, mother!"

Mrs. Rockwood smiled and put away her knitting, then bustled out to the pantry from which she soon returned with a tray laden with freshly baked cake, and shining rosy apples.

As she placed it on the table a gust of wind banged an unsecured shutter against the wall, and pressed rudely against windows and doors trying to find its way in. The trees sighed mournfully, shivering and bending their leafless branches before its cruel power.

Mother and son, securely housed against the wintry blasts, drew their chairs more closely to the fire, and enjoyed the good things provided.

“What bitter weather! I cannot help thinking of that child! I really did not think she was sufficiently clad to-day. She wore a scanty waterproof cape and her arms were too full of bundles to allow her hands to be tucked under. I only wish I could furnish her with a warm wrap, comfortable gloves, and a hood, but I know the Prestons would not allow it,” the speaker sighed and continued, “But perhaps something may turn up to improve her position we know that the Lord will provide.”

“It may not be my way,
It may not be thy way;
But just in his own way
The Lord will provide,”

quoted the young man resuming the perusal of his paper.

Suddenly, he gave a startled exclamation. “Mother listen to this,” he cried, “is it a coincidence or would you call it an interposition of Providence?” Then he read impressively:—

“WANTED.—Information of CARLOTTA LAKE, nine years of age, taken from Children’s Home in B—— last April. Records of the Home destroyed by fire. Address, Wright and Biller, Attorneys, B——.”

“O Will, that is our Carlotta! Write at once, it may be some good news for her!”

“Well, mother, I trust so, at any rate it will not do any harm to write and inquire.”

“It will not be necessary to say anything about it until we hear something definite.”

“No, it would be sad to raise false hopes in the child’s mind.”

“I wonder if anyone else in town will notice that advertisement.”

“Probably not, I think I get the only copy sent here from B——. I’ll get paper and ink and write at once in order to satisfy the ‘Little Woman’s’ *curiosity*.”

“And the ‘Big Son’s’ proper spirit of inquiry of course,” returned the lady sarcastically.

The letter was written that night and taken to the post-office before school hours the next morning. The days passed slowly while they waited impatiently but hopefully for a reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD NEWS



Now the snow came down in large flakes like white winged birds, alighting on the trees to cover their bare branches and round out their gaunt outlines, hiding the bushes away until they resembled small round hills, drifting into hollows, covering the walks, shutting from view like a great thick veil all the landscape outside one's immediate vicinity.

Lottie stood beside the window in her little attic room watching the snowstorm. Occasionally she put her purple fingers to her mouth to breathe on and warm them, for the cold was intense in that part of the house, there being no fireplace, consequently Lottie spent the least time there possible. At night, with chattering teeth, she would hasten to undress and get in under covers, where she lay shivering for a long time ere she felt warmed up. When the wind blew fierce it found its way through the rickety window and blew on her head until she was compelled to draw the covers all up around it, her mop of curls not affording sufficient protection against Jack Frost's invasion.

On one extremely bitter night, Mrs. Preston had suggested that Lottie be allowed to sleep on the sitting-room lounge, but Claudia had given her veto.

"It would keep the room littered up, besides children don't feel the cold like grown-up people," she said, sitting before a grate fire in her own comfortable room, with her feet on the fender, and her shoulders enveloped in a warm dressing sacque of crimson eider-down.

Therefore Lottie continued in her frosty quarters, where, early in the mornings, she heard the cheery chirping of her little neighbors, the sparrows, who kept her company under the roof.

On this particular afternoon she had come, after the downstairs work was done, to make her bed and "tidy up" her cheerless little room, this task completed she stood by the window fascinated by the scene without.

"Isn't it lovely! I wonder if the girls are watching it! But the poor Little Woman! She will be all snowed in," she thought, "And Mr. Rockwood's 'Little Woman' too! I wish I could go to see her!"

That was the way she designated Mrs. Rockwood in her thoughts, and that lady, all unknown to herself, was a formidable rival of the original Little Woman who lived in the spout.

The short time spent at the Rockwoods' home was a green spot in Lottie's memory to which she often recurred. She had promised on bidding them good-bye

to go and see them often—quite often—if she could, and she felt so happy when the brooch was recovered that all things seemed possible to her childish outlook, she was so sure of being permitted to go back to see her friends, but, during the long, long time since then, she had not been able to visit them even once.

It is not surprising then, that while Lottie stood watching at her window, the outside view faded away gradually, until the wintry scene gave place to a summer one—a porch almost hid by roses where two people, a woman and a child, sat in the warm twilight, and a young man coming up the myrtle-bordered path exclaimed ruefully that his nose was out of joint!

A faint tinkle recalled Lottie from her dreaming to the present world of door bells, and she hurried to answer its summons. She opened the door to admit a lady who wore a small black bonnet, and an ample fur-trimmed cloak.

“Why, Mrs. Rockwood!” cried the little maid in pleased excitement. “Come in, you are all covered with snow!”

“That don’t matter, dear, it will brush off. No doubt I look like Grandma Santa Claus. And how are you, Carlotta?” said the lady. They went hand in hand into the parlor. Lottie drew an easy chair to the fire for the visitor.

"You are nearly frozen yourself, child, how cold your hands are, and sore!"

"Chaps!" answered Lottie, "they don't hurt much 'cept when I put them into the water. But I must go and tell Mrs. Preston you are here."

"My visit concerns you too, Lottie, you will hear all about it later. I'll have a talk first with Mrs. Preston," returned the lady.

Lottie darted off wondering what it could be that concerned her, something good, no doubt, for Mrs. Rockwood looked very much pleased.

She encountered Miss Preston on the stairway. The latter muttered something about the "New fashion when servants entertained their mistresses' callers," ending with, "Go and tell mamma to come down."

Claudia swished past Lottie and into the parlor where she greeted the caller in the blandest of tones.

Mrs. Preston had just awakened from her nap. It took her several minutes to arrange her hair and make herself presentable. Her glasses were not to be found so Lottie remained to hunt for them while the lady bustled from the room.

Lottie finding the spectacles in a short time hurried with them after their owner. When she reached the head of the stairs she observed Claudia coming out of the parlor, and, closing the door after her, intercept her mother to whisper loudly in her ears: "It's something

about Lottie. I guess she wants to get her away just when she's beginning to be of a little use, but don't give in to her!" Then espying the little girl, who had heard every word, she cried, "Go down stairs and stay until you are wanted!"

The two ladies entered the parlor, and Lottie went to the kitchen as she was bid. She sat by the stove enjoying the genial glow of the fire, wondering what it all meant. What did Miss Preston mean by those words to her mother, how did Mrs. Rockwood's visit concern her — Lottie?

The hands of the clock moved from three o'clock to half past three, while Lottie watched it vaguely excited and expectant.

At length Claudia came running down the stairs. Lottie arose expecting to be scolded for her idleness, instead of which, Claudia, who looked very much excited, said in a kindly tone: "Come with me, Lottie, we have good news for you."

Entering the parlor they found the two elderly ladies talking earnestly.

"Come here, Lottie," Mrs. Preston said, "Do you remember ever hearing your mamma speak of your Uncle Joe?"

"Uncle Joe Lake, yes often, he went out west a long time ago," returned the wondering Lottie.

"Did your mamma ever hear from him?"

"Mamma said he wrote to papa once, and papa wrote back, but we never got any more letters; then mamma wrote again when papa died to tell him about it."

"Well, little girl," said Mrs. Rockwood, "it seems your Uncle Joe never received any letter but the one your mamma wrote telling him of your papa's death, and that one reached him only after several months' delay. He was then very ill, but had his lawyer write to your mamma. He also made a will leaving all he possessed to her in trust for you."

Lottie had drawn close to the speaker; leaning on the arm of the big chair she listened with wide open eyes, hardly understanding anything but the fact of her uncle's illness.

"Did Uncle Joe get well?" she half whispered.

"No, dear, sad to say he died, and the lawyer has ever since been seeking you. He traced you at last to the Children's Home in B——; but a change had been made in the management, the old nurses and teachers were gone, and all the records were destroyed by fire. Advertising was then resorted to. My son by accident saw one a few nights ago. He wrote to the firm and received an answer this morning."

"I think he might have consulted mamma first, seeing that she has charge of Lottie," murmured Claudia, plaintively.

"As I explained before, Miss Preston, he thought it useless to say anything until he learned something definite, it might have raised false hopes and occasioned delay; but when he heard from Mr. Biller to-day he requested me to come and see you at once."

"Did the lawyer say how much Mr. Lake left?" inquired Mrs. Preston.

"Not exactly but he gives the impression that it is a considerable fortune."

"Is it for me?" asked Lottie in amazement.

"Yes, Carlotta, you will be a very wealthy little girl."

"Can I go to school and learn to play on the piano?"

"Certainly," returned Claudia, "as for going to school you have that advantage already, and you may have my piano to practice on."

Lottie gazed at the speaker, and then at the open piano, whose cool ivory keys she had never been allowed to press; to actually practice on that piano seemed more wonderful than all else she had just heard. Presently Mrs. Rockwood arose to take leave.

"Mr. Biller will be here in a couple of days to see Lottie and to examine the papers you received from the Home," she said addressing Mrs. Preston, "Nothing will remain then to be done except to make arrangements for Carlotta's future and have her make choice of a guardian."

"Mamma's half-brother, Uncle Reginald, will do splendidly for a guardian, and of course Lottie will con-

tinue to make her home with us," said Miss Preston, convincingly, "Why I declare it is still snowing, good day, Mrs. Rockwood."

"Good day, good-bye Carlotta," returned the visitor. On her way home Mrs. Rockwood was amused at the dexterous manner in which Miss Preston stood in Lottie's way, whichever direction she turned, to prevent her getting a chance to say any good-bye words at a close range. As the lady turned from the gate she heard the child's far-away tones saying, "Good-bye, Mrs. Rockwood, good-bye."

CHAPTER IX.

HAPPY DAYS



IN THE time that intervened before the lawyer's arrival Lottie heard many praises of "Uncle Reginald"—his love for children, his kindness and other good qualities. She had never before heard Miss Preston praise anyone so warmly, it was the more curious because previously that lady always curled her lip and called him an "old foggy" whenever her mother referred to him.

"You will do well for yourself by choosing my brother, Mr. Green, for your guardian," Mrs. Preston said impressively ere Lottie was sent in to meet Mr. Biller. When the question finally came up Mrs. Preston and her daughter sounded Mr. Green's praises; the little girl was too bewildered to say anything, her silence seemed to acquiesce, and the lawyer concluded that Uncle Reginald was favorably known to her.

"I have not the honor of the gentleman's acquaintance," he said, "but I've no doubt it will be an admirable arrangement, as for me I could not think of anyone



"CAN I CHOOSE ANYONE I WANT?"

except Mr. Rockwood, he is much interested in my small client's welfare but——”

Here Lottie gave a wondering gasp. “Can I choose anyone I want?” she said anxiously.

“Certainly, I thought you knew that,” returned the gentleman, surprised.

“No sir, I didn't know—then I'd just love to have Mr. Rockwood for my guardian,” she cried. The lawyer smiled at her earnestness. “So be it,” he returned. “As for your future residence, Mrs. Preston and her amiable daughter, are anxious to keep you, and, as you are so nicely situated here, perhaps you may wish to remain with them or if not, my partner, Mr. Wright, has a pleasant home and a nice family in B——, they will be pleased to have you, then there is your guardian's home.”

“Could I stay there?” asked Lottie.

“Yes, little girl.”

Claudia started up exclaiming, “What is the use of all this talk. Of course it is understood that Lottie will remain in mamma's charge!”

“She can make her choice though. It is my duty to acquaint her with the several places that are open to her!”

“It is absurd to allow a mere child to settle that question,” stormed Miss Preston.

The lawyer looked at Lottie inquiringly, “Well, have you decided?”

"Oh yes, I would like to live with the 'Little Woman,'" returned Lottie quickly, feeling somewhat like Mrs. Preston felt on the few occasions when she braved her daughter's wrath.

"'Little Woman,'" said Mr. Biller mystified.

Lottie corrected herself with a blush. "I mean at Mrs. Rockwood's," she said.

"Such ingratitude," cried Miss Preston, "after mamma has been so kind, so foolishly indulgent, as I have often told her!"

"Children sometimes fancy new places," began the lawyer conciliatingly, and then as the young lady flounced from the room, he thought to himself that she was not so sweet-tempered and amiable as she had at first appeared.

Claudia was very angry. Her visions of having her own room and the parlor newly furnished, of several new costumes, and a long-desired visit to a fashionable seaside resort were rudely shattered by the little bound girl she had despised. She had anticipated handling the money for Lottie's board and maintenance—the lawyer had named a liberal amount—but all was useless now, that "ungrateful minx" had chosen otherwise.

"It is all your own fault, Claudia," her mother said, "I am not surprised at Lottie's choice. It might have been different though—she was disposed to like you very much at first—it is easy to gain a child's love—but you were hateful to her always."

Miss Preston could not deny the charge, which fact did not tend to brighten the case. Her harshness and ill temper had brought a sorry harvest, but she still talked of the ingratitude and meddling of others.

* * * * *

In due time everything was settled. Lottie went to live at the Rockwoods where she received the cordial welcome they would have given her in her poverty. The blue room was now her very own and a new piano soon found its way into the sitting-room. She attended school regularly, and the girls who used to turn up their noses at the idea of playing with a "bound girl" were eager to have her for a companion in her altered condition.

Needless to say, her dearest playmates were still Maude and Edie, who had proven themselves friends indeed, in the olden times.

At Lottie's request Mrs. Rockwood arranged for the two girls to share Lottie's music and drawing lessons; she argued that since they had shared their books with her it was only fair that she should share her good fortune with them. Her guardian saw no objection.

"When Carlotta becomes her own mistress she can have no cause to regret a good action done, while she would probably think sorrowfully of the good she was prevented from doing."

So it was arranged to everybody's delight, Mrs. Rockwood however declared that she drew the line at hearing the scales for six hours daily, so Maude and Edie practiced at their teacher's home.

They held a love feast at the Little Woman's house one day in the following spring, when the gutter was bright, and clean, and bordered with green, sprouting grass and plants.

With no fear of the gate opening to recall one of their number—in fact their old aversion, Miss “Claudy,” treated them with cold hauteur when they met—they decked their hair with ivy wreaths, and played to their hearts' content. And there at the place of their first meeting, the three girls pledged eternal friendship not forgetting to include the Little Woman, for, as they often said:—

“It was all happily brought about
By the dear Little Woman in the Spout.”

THE END.

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